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Evaluation

Management response to the assessment of the Millennium Development Goals reports

I. Background and purpose

1. In late 2002, UNDP initiated steps for a rapid assessment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reports. The proposed assessment was based on the premise that progress in terms of the number of country reports produced was not a substitute for quality, especially with regard to participation, disaggregation and presentation.

2. The assessment touched on a wide range of issues ranging from the capacity of countries capacity to monitor progress to the nature and characteristics of the MDG reports. This note summarizes the response of UNDP to the challenges identified by the assessment with respect to the quality of MDG reports and the process for preparing country reports.

II. Content of MDG reports and relation to other instruments

3. The assessment notes variations in the quality of MDG reports across countries and their relationships with other reporting instruments such as the national human development reports (NHDRs), common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF), and nationally owned documents. In the light of the findings and recommendations, management has revised the MDG reports guidance note – first issued in October 2001 – through a broad-based consultation within the United Nations Development Group. The revised note addresses many of the concerns and issues raised in the assessment. Management has shared the findings and recommendations contained in the assessment with the United Nations Country Teams engaged in the preparation of MDG reports.

03-62747 (E) 261103 261103

4. The main issues emphasized in this second guidance note are: (a) national ownership and participation in the preparation of MDG reports; (b) better use of disaggregated data to identify development gaps and help set priorities in resource allocation; (c) capacity development to promote active participation of key development actors; and (d) advocacy and campaigning, with the MDG report serving as a tool to build consensus around development priorities.

5. In order to clarify differences and strengthen synergies among the various reporting processes, management has organized several monitored discussions in the UNDP knowledge networks about the relations between MDG reports and NHDRs, poverty reduction strategy papers, and the CCA/UNDAF process, respectively.

III. MDG reports for campaigning and social mobilization

6. The purpose of the MDG report is two-fold: public information and social mobilization. The MDG report addresses a national audience in an effort to 'bring the MDGs home'. Revision of the guidance note to make the MDG reports more reader-friendly was the first management response to findings from the assessment. Mechanisms for closer consultation have been defined to improve coordination so that the publication of each MDG report is accompanied by a clearly defined communication and advocacy campaign.

IV. National ownership and consensus building

7. The assessment reveals wide variations in country ownership in the preparation of MDG reports. The revised guidance note is clear in stressing the importance of national ownership and capacity development as the basic principles underlying the MDG reports.

8. Specific recommendations to build national ownership in the preparation of MDG reports are: (a) translation of global goals into nationally agreed targets to take account of national development priorities; and (b) national definition of the time-span for achieving the MDGs. Global targets defined for the period 1990-2015 may not be relevant for all countries, such as those that did not exist in 1990 or those that lack data comparable to benchmark indicators.

9. The assessment recommends avoiding the erroneous conclusion that government participation in the preparation of the MDG report is equivalent to national ownership. Management emphasizes the importance of tailoring and customizing targets through broad-based, inclusive dialogue and debate. Close collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) is essential for widening support and consensus around the MDGs. Management of the Millennium Trust Fund, which provides partial support to the preparation of MDG reports remains flexible to ensure that expediency is not used as a justification to limit CSO participation. While involving more partners will inevitably lengthen the process, it is essential to generating a stronger sense of national ownership and building a greater MDG coalition.

V. Capacity building

10. The assessment identifies the fact that effective participation in preparing MDG reports is often constrained by in-country capacity. UNDP is streamlining its interventions to help strengthen the capacity of national actors to engage in policy discussions and to improve policy implementation and monitoring of the MDGs.

11. An area of particular concern is the need to improve statistical capacity at the country level. UNDP departs from the recommendation of the assessment to promote 'global surveys on MDGs following a standard set of global guidelines to compare performance across countries and regions of the world'. The estimation of MDG indicators is based on the standard data sources at the country level, such as administrative agencies and household-based surveys. Efforts to strengthen global reporting should not be permitted to undermine countries' efforts to improve national statistical capacity.

12. Management is making provision to reinforce UNDP participation in existing mechanisms for inter-agency coordination to strengthen countries statistical capacity as the basis for improving global data sources. In collaboration with bilateral donors, United Nations organizations, the World Bank and other multilateral organizations, UNDP is addressing three challenges: (a) strengthen the collection of development data according to internationally agreed methodologies; (b) improve data dissemination by establishing a central repository of data for MDGs and related indicators; and (c) build capacity among government officials, CSOs, parliamentarians, and the media to use data for evidence-based policy-making and programming, as well as for advocacy and campaigning.